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Labor-Power as It's Found: Surplus Labor and Development Initiatives in Revolutionary Zanzibar

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Introduction

In 1964, the Zanzibar Revolution and subsequent violence created a tremor for the pan-Africanist cause. Seeking to build a society on the principles of African nationalism and self-reliance, the newly formed Zanzibar Revolutionary Council (ZRC) under the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) took control of the state and aimed to create a system of planning which would modernize the island and make it self-sufficient. The various elements of the bureaucracy, from the communist *umma party* to the more conservative ASP members, attempted to cohere together a system which could decolonize the economy and rid it of dependency on export for the west using a variety of schemes and plans. State authorities also attempted to create a new labor force, utilizing existing pools of surplus labor, often without pay. These pools included rural squatters, prisoners (many of whom were Arab and Asian former businessmen and landowners), vagrant urban youth, and others conscripted for mandatory “service days.” Ultimately, this system failed to transform these populations into the disciplined and regimented working class it deemed necessary to complete this drive towards self-sufficiency.

This essay will explore the power dynamics between the state and these new workers in early-independence Zanzibar, drawing on interviews and surveys conducted on the island. It begins with the colonial background, analyzing how the British created semi-proletarianized and transient classes to facilitate market production. Then, I will explore how the developmental regime took over hollowed out colonial institutions and used surplus labor to fulfill their ambitions, which will be followed by a social history of working conditions for these laborers. Next, I take a brief look at land reform movements and instabilities in this political economy, and conclude by examining how the state utilized ideology to glue this system together.

The political economy of mid-twentieth century Zanzibar can be understood through the concept of *combined and uneven development*, or the interaction between the dominant capitalist world economy and the systems it overtakes.¹ However, while most analyses of this phenomena examine capitalist states, this one will be looking specifically at an attempt to create a socialist developmentalist state, one that aimed to rapidly modernize the country into self-sufficiency with the goal of raising the living standards and creating a social safety net.

The developmental state in Zanzibar, under the direction of the ZRC, took a somewhat different approach than other such projects around the continent, including Nyerere's *Ujamaa* on the Tanzanian mainland. For example, rather than taking the villagization approach to land reform, the ZRC tried to appease its squatter base by handing out smallholder plots under state control. The result, to this day, is a system of peasants vaguely linked to markets with a state based land tenure system. Following the lead of China and the USSR, a series of low-productivity yet widespread State-Owned Industries (SOEs) were created throughout the islands. In order to facilitate this the state used pre-existing and now superfluous surpluses of labor to carry this out, often relying on old colonial systems of labor such as the *corvée* or "gang labor" which was essential to the colonial state and legitimized for similar reasons of development.²

Interpretations of the use of forced and "volunteer" labor appear in the work of other scholars, most notably Elisabeth McMahan.³ McMahan, operating on a similar framework, draws a line through the use of this labor in national development projects, from the colonial and into the post-colonial era respectively. In her view, both systems utilized the language of

¹ Akin L. Mabogunje, "Urban Planning and the Post-Colonial State," *African Studies Review* 33, no. 2 (1990): 121-203.

² Opolot Okia, *Communal Labor in Colonial Kenya: the Legitimization of Coercion, 1912-1930* (Publication location: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

³ Elisabeth McMahan. "Developing Workers: Coerced and 'Voluntary' Labor in Zanzibar, 1909-1970" in *International Labor and Working Class History*, 92, 114-133. 2017.

development and self-sufficiency to justify the policies of forced labor, but only one was (the British) seen as forced. “Regardless of ideology”, in McMahon’s words, both projects involved the coerced labor of former slaves.

Under the ZRC, as McMahon admits, the ‘targets’ of these initiatives changed. As will be seen, the transformation of the slave-relation into various social forms was essential to the history of the developmental regime. Nonetheless, this mobilization required not only the forced labor of the descendants of slaves, but that of any group of people which was rendered superfluous in the absence of production for the market. To essentially collapse the colonial and post-colonial development projects together is to flatten the stark differences between both. While both are similar in terms of some state initiatives, they are markedly different in terms of the forms both regimes took. Here, I seek to look at how the relation of these populations to production was manipulated, transformed, and utilized specifically in the context of this form of developmentalism. The imposition of the state, attempting to revolutionize the relations of production, is the specific social condition by which these labor systems must be analyzed.

Similar studies of said developmental regimes were also done earlier, in the 1970s and 80s, on the *ujamaa* in Tanzania. In the form of rigorous debates, multiple scholars debated Nyerere’s *ujamaa* socialism and its nature as a mode of production. Idrian Resnick believed that *ujamaa*, while still exploiting surplus from workers and peasants, was progressing towards socialism.⁴ In his seminal work, *Class Struggles in Tanzania*, Issa Shivji differed in believing that the bureaucratic class was able to negotiate a relative degree of autonomy from the global market, thus becoming a “bureaucratic bourgeoisie” arising out of local contradictions,

⁴ Idrian Resnick. *The Long Transition: Building Socialism in Tanzania*. Monthly Review Press, 1981.

externally linked to the international one.⁵ Lastly, Howard Stein rejected both of these arguments, believing the *ujamaa* to be chaotic internally in its attempt to organize surplus and thus the bureaucracy only “reproduced itself practically” as a tributary entity.⁶

Stein’s remarkable conclusion that the existence of the developmental state relied on its *expanded* reproduction is critical to this study of Zanzibar. The ZRC differed from mainland *ujamaa* in that took on East German style planning, and did not make an immediate move to collectivized agriculture. Still, like in Stein’s analysis, what makes various institutions function in an incoherent system was the state’s ability to arrange and re-arrange its continued existence. The Zanzibari state’s legitimacy rested on its ability to modernize, and thus to modernize it needed to utilize existing surpluses of labor and empty halls of bureaucratic power. In part due to the system’s incoherence, the state was unable to successfully transform these populations into a disciplined working class.

Similarly relevant to this outlook on revolutionary Zanzibar are those scholars working on other theories developmental regimes, totalitarian systems whose primary goals are to develop productive forces and raise living standards for the general population. This includes Hillel Ticktin’s idea that the Soviet system was a “non-mode of production,” as well as the theory on how the Chinese state attempted to organize and cohere a productive system together during the Mao era.⁷ Finally, this paper owes a method of analysis to Michael Burawoy’s words to “examine how the process of production shapes the industrial working class not only objectively

⁵ Issa G. Shivji. *Class Struggles in Tanzania*. Monthly Review Press.

⁶ Howard Stein. “Theories of the State in Tanzania: A Critical Assessment” in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 105-123. 1985.

⁷ Hillel Ticktin. *The Origins of the Crisis in the USSR: Essays on the Political Economy of the of a Disintegrating System*. Routledge, 1992.

⁸ Chuang. “Sorghum and Steel” in *Chuang, Volume 1: Dead Generations*. Glasgow: Bell & Bain, 2019.

– that is the type of labor it carries out -- but subjectively – that is, the struggles engendered by a specific experience or interpretation of that labor.”⁹

Along with Tanzania, many post-independence countries were attempting to enact large scale developmentalist policies. Much unlike the contemporary development initiatives undertaken by NGOs with the help of the World Bank, these projects involved the heavy-handed intervention of the state on many accounts (though often in partnership with other countries). The emergent, nominally socialist Ghana under Nkrumah, for example, attempted to bring electric power to its rural hinterland by building the massive hydroelectric Akosombo Dam across the Volta River.¹⁰ In Kenya, while decidedly capitalist under Jomo Kenyatta, large scale housing development projects attempting to capture the incoming rural-urban migration were undertaken through the state.¹¹ At a certain point, then, self-determination, the guiding principle of national liberation and independence, was intimately tied with development and modernization. Those within these newborn nations began looking at the robust social democracies of Europe and to an extent the United States and sought to construct some of their own. A disciplined and yet well-endowed working class was a critical component to this level of development.

The revolutionary period in Zanzibar must therefore be contextualized within this wider developmentalist moment in Africa, seen in capitalist and aspiring socialist states alike. The ZRC, unlike even the socialist states of Nyerere and Nkrumah, did not at first take a non-aligned

⁹ Michael Burawoy. *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes Under Capitalism and Socialism*. New York: Verso, 1985. 8.

¹⁰ Stephen F. Miescher. “The Akosombo Dam and the Wuest for Rural Electrification in Ghana.” *Electric Worlds/Mondes électriques: Creations, Circulations, Tensions, Transitions, (19th-21st C.)*. pp. 317-342. 2016.

¹¹ Richard E. Stren. *Housing the Urban Poor in Africa: Policy, Politics, and Bureaucracy in Africa*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies. 1978.

position, and instead adopted close relations with Cuba and the GDR.¹² Nonetheless, Nyerere's union to create Tanzania did much to curb communist involvement in the ZRC, and the CIA concluded that Zanzibar was only under communist influence and rather than control.¹³ Quite unique, however, was the level of communist activity in the ZRC mostly coming from the local *umma* party of A.M. Babu, and in turn how much of local housing policy was done under the guidance of the GDR.

Ultimately, the failure of the ZRC's developmentalist regime to fully consolidate rested on its failure to resist market dependency, but this too was predicated on its inability to cohere a productive developmental system together. As will be shown, Zanzibar's idiosyncrasies at this period highlight certain aspects of the "quest for control" over labor that many independence states found themselves pursuing, an heirloom struggle from the colonial era (as many, including McMahon have investigated).¹⁴ By looking into this ambition, I hope to provide specific but still generalizable ideas on the nature of post-colonial development and the state of African labor.

The question, for example, of how labor was transformed and reconfigured to meet transformative goals, i.e. essentially sociopolitical ruptures in the relations of production, are essential to understanding the nature of productive forces in Africa and their future.¹⁵ How was labor time rearranged, manipulated, and organized to meet these goals? What was the level of their success in extending the power of the state to organize the labor process and the relations of production? These are the questions I hope to further in this paper.

¹² "CUBA BEGINS ROLE IN ZANZIBAR IN 61"; Havana's Part in Revolution Outlined in Washington—Guerilla Course Cited," *New York Times*. January 23rd, 1964.

¹³ Directorate of Intelligence. *Intelligence Study: Zanzibar: The Hundred Days Revolution*. (Washington: Central Intelligence Agency: CIA). 1966. 138.

¹⁴ Frederick Cooper. "Africa and the World Economy". *African Studies Review*, Vol 24 (2/3), 1981, 1-86.

¹⁵ Robert Brenner. "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe." *Past & Present*, no. 70 (1976): 30-75.

While this research was originally intended to be done in Zanzibar and Pemba, the Covid-19 Pandemic hampered these plans. As the archives could not be extensively accessed, I relied on what newspapers I could find, government documents, and phone interviews done with a variety of former workers and officials. Former workers gave detailed testimony on working conditions and daily tasks, as well as home life and more general standards of living. Other oral histories and books on this period helped illuminate this, alongside my own personal experiences on a previous research trip to the archipelago. Drawing on these sources, this article expands our knowledge of the political economy non-capitalist and socialist regimes during the twentieth century.

The Colonial Stasis

In Adam Shafi's social realist novel *Kuli*, his character Rashid offers a view into the daily life of Zanzibar's working class. Arising early, Rashid headed towards the port of Zanzibar Town to search for work. Surrounded by hundreds of other Africans clamoring at the gates, given work tickets by an Indian man, this labor was competitive and precarious as the workers' lives. Perusing the docks, Rashid was yelled at sternly by an Arab man who called him everything from "boy" to "*kalb*," or "dog." In the distance lurked a British overseer, gazing calmly at the chaos in the port of Zanzibar. Notably young, Rashid's father had passed away not too long ago, in part because of overwork and exhaustion. His mother, with no discernable rural ties, was forced into the "informal sector" as a street seller to keep their family afloat. As a 14-year-old in colonial Zanzibar, Rashid was already on the docks searching for labor as a "*kuli*," or porter.¹⁶ Rashid is forced to labor precarious shifts of backbreaking labor, constantly struggling

¹⁶ Adam Shafi. *Kuli*. Nairobi: Longhorn Publishers, 1979. 1-19.

to make ends meet. Eventually, however, his consciousness enlivens and he becomes an active participant in the labor movement.

This fictionalized account of the labor of a porter was emblematic of the experience of thousands of Africans living not only in colonial Zanzibar but much of the East African Coast. Along with the Copper Belt, these workers were among the most militant in Sub-Saharan Africa. Joined by the discontented squatters and peasants, in 1948 these workers launched a general strike that Clayton attributed to the rise of pan-Africanism in Zanzibar.¹⁷ Much of this sentiment was later bottled up and funneled into the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) after the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964. A sizable portion of the party's constituent base came from these urban laborers, many of them migrant workers from mainland Tanganyika.

The casual laborers of the port of Zanzibar were not the "shock troops of industrialization," the workers who built the railroads in Britain and India in the words of Hobsbawm.¹⁸ These were the unfortunate facilitators of underdevelopment and resource extraction, finding commonplace with peasants and porters throughout the continent. Many of these workers, often described as "African" or "Mainlander," came from a variety of ethnicities and primarily inhabited what was called *ng'ambo*, or "the other side," the extensive slum racially segregated from the adjacent "Stone Town." This glaring symbol of inequality and the ossified racial tensions later became a focal point for the revolutionary government. The target of this government's ultimate ambitions was to undo the conditions of underdevelopment and racism as allegedly spawned by the British and Arabs.

¹⁷ Anthony Clayton. "The General Strike in Zanzibar, 1948". *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 417-4. Cambridge University Press, 1976.

¹⁸ Eric Hobsbawm. *Age of Capital: 1848-1875*. New York: Vintage Books. 56

Mainland and African workers, as portrayed in *Kuli*, were thus “the longest established section of the Zanzibar proletariat”, placed “in an area where their position was constantly thrust upon them”.¹⁹ Dockworkers and casual laborers, described in their militancy in Frederick Cooper’s *On the African Waterfront*, were not necessarily a disciplined reserve army of labor, but what Cooper calls a “guerilla army of the underemployed”.²⁰²¹ As in the case of the fictional Rashid, this labor was extremely precarious and far from guaranteed. The persistence of the informal sector and the overcrowding of *ng’ambo* had designated these workers as a “surplus population” that was necessary, but ultimately superfluous to production. This precarity, superfluous labor, and sense of discontent are things that these laborers shared in common with peasant squatters.

The squatters, another surplus population, was the direct product of reconfigurations in the mode of production. The Zanzibar archipelago itself, consisting of the islands of Unguja and Pemba, had for a long time been under the rule of the Busaidi Sultante, originally from Oman. The decisive transition here was from a commercial empire dealing extensively in the slave trade to that of an extensive plantation system worked by domestic slavery to produce cloves.²² The British, establishing a protectorate and taking several measures, including blockades and series of treaties, had gradually abolished both the slave trade and slavery for domestic production. But, without the necessary foresight, “ex-slaves did not become regular workers; they became

¹⁹ B.D. Bowles. “The Struggle for Independence: 1946-1963.” In *Zanzibar Under Colonial Rule*, edited by Abdul Sheriff and Ed Ferguson. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1991.88-89.

²⁰ Frederick Cooper. *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

²¹ Frederick Cooper. “Africa and the World Economy”...

²² Abdul Sheriff. *Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1987.

squatters on plantation land and, most often, day or seasonal workers” and thus did not shirk precarity, but rather mixed subsistence farming with occasional wage labor.²³

From here, any self-sufficiency the peasantry had on Unguja was gradually undermined by imperialism. The poor peasantry of mostly ex-slaves gravitated to becoming “reserve labor” for clove plantations.²⁴ By 1930, around 5,741 Africans worked as ‘weeders’ on plantations and 7,539 mainlanders produced food crops.²⁵ Gradually, with the intensification of capitalist penetration into peasant production, much of this agricultural labor was transformed into commodity production. The commercialization of peasant production, critical for linking peasants to markets in colonial development schemes, created a clear threat to the lives of squatters. This tension, along with the competition for land among squatters, helped generate the interracial animosity and factionalism so characteristic of the 1964 revolution.²⁶ Land and land ownership was critical to this population of peasants and squatters, and the popular land reform program by the ASP to be discussed later is evidence of this sentiment.

But while these class dimensions were crucial, the economy was also distinctly racialized. It is an important point that not all Arabs were landowners. In fact, the fluidity of race was the standard prior to the British ossification of different categories. It is important, however, to take into account Stuart Hall’s words of “race as the modality through which class is lived, the medium in which class relations are experienced” as being particularly relevant to the Zanzibari

²³ Frederick Cooper. *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997. 5.

²⁴ Abdul Sheriff. “The Peasantry Under Imperialism: 1873-1963.” in *Zanzibar Under Colonial Rule*, edited by Abdul Sheriff and Ed Ferguson. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1991. 117.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 119.

²⁶ M. Catherine Newbury. “Colonialism, Ethnicity, and Rural Political Protest: Rwanda and Zanzibar in Comparative Perspective.” In *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1983, pp. 253-280.

experience.²⁷ Michael Lofchie, for one, is keen to understand the ascent of various political parties by appealing to these stark racial lines which became reified as classes.²⁸

It is also necessary to make clear that racial discourse, in as much as it was picked up and altered by the British and their race science, was a local one. This discourse latched onto the onset of capitalist development and British colonialism. In Glassman's words, "the construction of a racial state began not with British conquest in 1890 but with actions of Omani Arabs who conquered Zanzibar and the adjacent coast during the preceding century".²⁹ The reification of the 'racial state' through class pit various groups such as the Hadimu, Mainlanders, and Shirazi against those now perceived as Arabs and Indians.³⁰ Undoing the conditions of combined and uneven development and "Arabocentrism" became fundamental to the revolutionary government.

On Pemba, however, a different situation played out. With more arable land, ownership was more diverse and less racially stratified. On non-plantation land, ownership was often communal on the basis of kinship. Thus, the same racial tensions which played out in Zanzibar were scant until the arrival on John Okello on the island. This is not to say that systems of squatting did not exist, as they most certainly did. Rather, the land tenure arrangements in Pemba were not similar enough for the ASP to displace their racially charged political rhetoric onto the island in the same way they did in Zanzibar. This virtual rejection of ASP policy led to an uneasy

²⁷ Stuart Hall, Critcher, Chas, Jefferson, Tony, Clarke, John N., and Roberts, Brian. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan, 1978. 394.

²⁸ Michael F. Lofchie. *Zanzibar: Background to Revolution*. Princeton, N.J.: Prince University Press, 1965.

²⁹ Jonathan Glassman. *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011. 23.

³⁰ It is worth noting that many 'Arabs' who were killed in 1964 who not necessarily anyone who could be described as Arab but recent migrants to islands from the Arabian Peninsula known as *WaManga*, as opposed to more established and assimilated Swahili-Arabs.

relationship between the island and the party which reverberated to the present day electoral politics. In terms of labor, however, similar surplus populations of peasant squatters existed on the island and were similarly utilized to help build the infrastructure of modernization.

The British had managed to keep Zanzibar in a growingly explosive stasis, further fomented by increasing penetration of the capitalist market into the local economy. Overcrowded areas of non-arable land left large populations of indigenous Hadimu discontent with their conditions, the commercialization of agriculture had begun to alienate squatters from their land, the precarity of casual labor had funneled an already militant group of workers into the ASP. On Pemba, squatters, though less militant, were also living in similar conditions to their Zanzibari counterparts. Together, these groups constituted a series of surplus populations, transient classes at the whim of uneven development. Combined with the ossification of race relations, the colonial stasis left contradictions which resolved themselves in violence. In the wake of this were pools of surplus labor to be called upon by a developmentalist regime in the form of the Zanzibar Revolutionary Council (ZRC).

Taking the Reins as They Found Them

After independence, the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) government quickly crumbled under a coup led by Field Marshall John Okello. The collapse of the government was followed by a quick seizure of state power while Okello made his rounds of pogroms against the Arab and Asian populations. While the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), an African Nationalist party popular among mainlanders and African peasants in Unguja, initially opposed independence in fear of an

Arab takeover, Abeid Amani Karume soon found himself at the reigns of the hollowed out Zanzibari state.³¹

The violence of the 1964 revolution provided the embryonic revolutionary state a template to work with by doing away with the former holders of institutional power. In a gamble with violent revolution, Karume forced the hand of the Arab establishment and used Okello as necessary. This is the point that the developmental state built from. Combining with the communist, Eastern aligned, *Umma Party*, the ASP quickly took to creating a plan for a new, modern Zanzibar free from the racialist regime and market dependency of the protectorate days. To achieve this modernization and self-sufficiency, the ZRC had to tap into pools of surplus labor which existed since the protectorate period to build infrastructure of nationalization and self-reliance. Tactics to achieve this included communal farms, public housing projects, swimming pools, factories, roads, and other such amenities. Given the ASP rhetoric attacking the exploiters of the past and undoing their attributed conditions, the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of its base rested on its ability to modernize the islands. It could only do so, however, by using these pools of surplus labor which were mostly transient and unstable classes, and often entrenched existing productive systems while also undermining them. These tendencies and dynamics will be explored further below.

Soon after the initial bloodshed of 1964, in an attempt to stabilize the situation, Karume expelled Okello from the island and began consolidating power in the army and police. Labor unions (split between *Umma* and the ASP), bureaucracies, factories, and corporations were subsumed into the germinal nation's state apparatus. Much as the capitalist "must begin by

³¹ A.M. Babu. "The 1964 Revolution: Lumpen or Vanguard?" in *Zanzibar Under Colonial Rule*, edited by Abdul Sheriff and Ed Ferguson. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1991.

taking the labor-power as he finds it in the market,” so too did the ZRC pick up labor, capital, and power where it found them in the wake of the colonial stasis’ explosion.³²

The formal power of workers contained in the unions had been absorbed by the state, just as the Arab-Indian capital and power had been. The Clove Growers Association (CGA) and African Wharfage Company were two examples of this, just as the machinery of the Indian factories had also been seized by the state. The coup initiated by John Okello which overthrew the Sultan, approved by Karume or not, facilitated or at least inaugurated the liquidation of Arab-Indian capital and power necessary for this drive at modernization. Haroub Ali remembered decades later [I’m assuming the interview was decades later] that when he arrived in Stone Town from Pemba in [what year?] the area was mostly abandoned by the Arabs and Indians, who left with their property and assets seized.³³ Stone Town, the aforementioned area, was to be left in a state of neglect for the duration of the Karume years. Ali’s father, like many of the Arabs and Asians that did not flee, was placed in prison and later released to do labor on a state-run coconut farm.

This dynamic described above is a repeated pattern on both islands in Zanzibar during this period. For one, the intentional *underdevelopment* of Stone Town, which was then seen as a beacon of imperialist-capitalist power to the ASP, was necessary to allow for the *development* of what was to be the “modern city” in *ng’ambo*. The underdevelopment of the former was made necessary for the development of the latter. Factories allowed them to plan for self-sufficiency and taking over the CGA allowed them to control the clove trade and build up foreign reserves. With their power and capital taken from them, the people who once lived in Stone Town were now a labor surplus, free hands now idle and without power.

³² Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*. London: Penguin, 1990. 291.

³³ Bruce McKim. *Interview with Ali Haroub Ali*.

Without renewed trade at the docks and the commercialization of agriculture, the surplus populations discussed now became what Ruth Wilson-Gilmore would call a “surplus of labor”.³⁴ But while Gilmore analyzes surpluses of labor, essentially idle hands, in relation to capital as a “relative surplus population” as in the previous cases; the temporary absence of the commercialization of agriculture which threatened squatters, and the slowdown of trade which employed the casual laborers left these workers as a surplus of *potential* labor without the immediate relation to capital. In terms of the state, if capital takes labor where it finds it, it must also be made subordinate to its interests if it is to fully develop as the capitalist system. The peasant population was not made entirely subordinate to capital or the state, but remained a transient class only under the “legal shell of a capitalist agricultural economy”.³⁵ The state could guide peasants to markets on a rudimentary level, but not exert the control of labor necessary to fully master production.³⁶ The imposition of commercial agriculture was an attempt at extending this, which helped to catalyze the explosion that was the Zanzibar Revolution.

If, starting here, the ASP’s ambition was to undo colonial conditions, nowhere was there a more glaring reminder of them than in the Stone Town-Ng’ambo divide. From the beginning, as stated in the pro-ASP newspaper *Afrika Kwetu*, the new government had already announced its intentions to redevelop Ng’ambo alongside its achievement of overthrowing the Sultan.³⁷ According to *The New York Times*, the revolutionary government had planned on converting clove plantations into rice fields and to pull down the homes of 45,000 people for socialized

³⁴ Ruth Wilson-Gilmore. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

³⁵ Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters...* 3-5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ “Plan za Majumba za Ng’ambo.” *Afrika Kwetu*. January 2nd, 1964.

housing.³⁸ Much like the shell of the colonial state, the ZRC also picked up the British scheme to redevelop the slums. According to Myers, post-colonial schemes built upon colonial ones, and both were an attempt at imposing order and extending power over the constituent masses.³⁹ That is “ng’ambo’s disorderly alleys were not conducive to the operation of the surveillance apparatus”; while this is true both in the case of the colonial and post-colonial schemes, the difference is the regime’s which were being produced and how they reproduced themselves.⁴⁰

Surpluses of Labor and Power

Whereas the British might have conscripted a paid labor force, transforming or creating some semblance of a proletariat, the ZRC relied on these surpluses of labor to preform “volunteer” work *kunjenga taifa* or “to build the nation”. Construction of the flats began in 1966, not only in Unguja but also in Pemba in towns such as Mkoani, Wete, and Chake Chake. Around the same time in 1964, around 1,000 prisoners were released, in 1965 around 106, and finally by 1966 around 2,00 prisoners total were released.⁴¹ Much like Haroub Ali’s father, these Arab and Indian prisoners were sent to work on farms or the housing either for free or for a small wage, on the condition that they could also grow food. By 1972, the prison system was overhauled in favor of this form of labor, and each laborer was given a meager Shs 150/mo and a small plot to grow food.⁴² Others, less fortunate, faced torture and re-arrest.

³⁸ The New York Times. “Zanzibar Regime Reported to Seize Karume’s Foes.” *The New York Times*. November 8, 1964. <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/11/08/archives/zanzibar-regime-reported-to-seize-karume-foes.html>

³⁹ Garth Andrew Myers. “A Stupendous Hammer: Colonial and Post-colonial Reconstructions of Zanzibar’s Other Side.” *Urban Studies* 32, no. 8 (1995): 1345-359.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Anthony Clayton. *The Zanzibar Revolution and Its Aftermath*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1981. 125.

⁴² Ibid.

The ZRC was in many ways following through the colonial “quest for control”, but at the same time attempting to circle around capitalism and market dependency.⁴³ Nonetheless, the accumulation of foreign currency reserves, in part made possible by the clove boom, helped to boost wages in Zanzibar Town above that of the Mainland. Even so, when imports from the Eastern Bloc were halted in attempt to increase rice production (another strategy for self-reliance), the reserves were never used to ameliorate the hunger caused by this. Subsequent drops in clove prices proved quite harmful to the island’s economy, forcing the hand of Aboud Jumbe, successor to Karume, to slowly marketize.

Factories in this era were built and operated in order to boost potential self-sufficiency. According to Rehema Salum, the coconut oil factory she worked at in Pemba had a base quota of eight barrels, and workers were not permitted to leave until this quota was met. Evening shifts only had around five people working, and most of this oil was sold for people in the countryside.⁴⁴ After this factory, Rehema worked at a soap factory feeding machines ripe coconuts alongside a boy names Haji. This system employed around 30 people total and paid a rate of 15/2 shillings which was standard across most state-run factories. Placed under the *Wizara ya Biashara* or “Ward of Business”, which was further divided between *Bizanje* for imports the Zanzibar State Trading Corporation (ZSTC) for export, these factories were nonetheless short-lived and experimental. According to her, eventually there was an abundance of soap and oils, yet little interest in them on part of the people. This factory dried up and was later shut down.

These two factories, along with the soda and noodle factories, hired an extraordinary amount of migrant labor from the countryside. The migrant labor system, which was common to

⁴³ Cooper, *Africa and the World Economy*...

⁴⁴ Bruce McKim. *Interview With Bi Rehema Salum*.

much of the African continent, was here reproduced. These migrants were likely part of the transient classes discussed above, squatters or semi-proletarianized peasants, who could split time between small wage-labor contracts and subsistence farming. Given the temporary existence of the factories, they could not fully transform them into a stable, reliable proletariat. Much like the development workers to be discussed, their labor facilitated the expansion and cohesion of the state until no longer possible. This persistence of migrant labor and the pass system is also not limited to the factories.

When building numerous housing projects, arguably the largest legacy of the modernization drive and this period in general, the *Wizara ya Biashara* relied heavily on this migrant, often volunteer labor. Hamad Said, a boss of a construction site at Micheweni, holds that he employed around 300 workers who traveled regularly from different parts of the island to work.⁴⁵ These laborers, recruited from the countryside by the Sheha (village leader) to “build the nation” were split into work groups that worked alternating days of the week.⁴⁶ Reminiscent to earlier established systems of “gang labor”, these workers in turn relied on subsistence production at home to substitute the lack of a wage. Rashid Khalfan, who worked in an autoshop in Tibirinzi, Pemba, noted that the majority of his coworkers came from the countryside and used the peasant diet to subsidize the low-wages.⁴⁷ As a result of the involvement of women’s societies and organizations, these sites had considerable amounts of women working, though not many. If these workers were lazy, they face a punishment or, according to Myers, be labeled as “traitors to national development”.⁴⁸ Gang and migrant labor, two colonial mainstays, were then at the helm of nationalist production.

⁴⁵ Adam Benjamin. *Interview with Hamad Said*. September 30, 2020.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Adam Benjamin. *Interview with Rashid Khalfan*. August 30, 2020.

⁴⁸ Myers, “Stupendous Hammer.”

Most skilled *fundi* or carpenters, such as Mwalimu Nassor Shehe, were paid a wage but not enough to subsidize them or their families. Nassor Shehe claimed he was farming food for subsistence rather than attempting to purchase food on the market, even the state run stores, as subsistence farming was more cost effective and feasible than relying on the small wage.⁴⁹ A volunteer, Abdallah Amour Said primarily poured concrete and described his work as “*kazi za kibarua*” which is similar to casual or day laborer. Without payment, he also relied on subsistence, and as his work ended in 1980, he resumed farming full time. Without the ability to pay a subsistence wage, the transient nature of these classes was retained and, in some ways, entrenched as the worksite clearly did not reproduce these workers.

Yet the work process was never straightforward, and many volunteers made poor laborers according to some interviews. Ali Nassor Ali started building houses in 1971 when he was recruited by the police, who, alongside the military, were a key part of the recruitment of labor. Ali, also a paid as a *fundi*, attested that while there weren’t many lazy workers, if there were the workers would be given extra work as punishment on the site.⁵⁰ This method of enforcing quotas and productivity is another example of a common theme. Just as the government halted rice imports and told the peasants to grow more, in order to cope with absenteeism, the government added hours to the workday, according to Mohammad Abdallah Mohammad.⁵¹ In turn, he attests, the post-colonial era was different in that speed had drastically increased. But at the end of the day, according to him, “work is work” and changes were scant.⁵² From gang work, migrant labor, and subsistence production, these patterns shown in these interviews greatly speak to a persistence or entrenchment of the combined and uneven development, while reconfiguring the

⁴⁹ Adam Benjamin. *Interview with Mwalimu Nassor Shehe*. September 30, 2020.

⁵⁰ Adam Benjamin. *Interview with Ali Nassor Ali*. October 5, 2020.

⁵¹ Adam Benjamin. *Interview with Mohammad Abdallah Mohammad*. September 18, 2020.

⁵² *Ibid.*

dynamic for the developmental regime's purposes. Still, the purpose of this labor remained different in form.

In Unguja, while the exact social composition differs, a very similar situation of reallocating surplus populations to become temporary laborers was taking place. Khamis Ali Juma, born in Kidoti in the north of Unguja, was a carpenter who primarily made and fixed doors and windows.⁵³ While he too worked in Michenzani, the centerpiece of what was to be the main city, his main worksite was in Gamba where there were around 8 buildings constructed from around 1969 to 1974. The volunteer labor force was also large, and non-skilled laborers were given a pass from their *sheha* to work. Some worked every day and others only a few times per week. According to him: "I've heard you can also find them [housing projects] in Pemba".

Mohammad Salim Abdallah was born in Uroa, arriving in outside of Zanzibar City around 1950 as a child. Unlike Khamis, he was relegated to doing "daily work" because in his own words there was simply no other employment around.⁵⁴ Much like many other workers then, he belonged to this group of surplus labor. He was given a small amount of food while volunteering, enough to keep him working. Eventually he was educated to be an electrician and was employed to install electricity in the housing projects, paid around 60 shillings/mo. While many before the revolution did work from time to time as hired, it wasn't until Karume declared "those who can will have to work" that these populations were ushered to the forefront.⁵⁵ So, as Mohammad reminded me, people from all over came to help, from villages and farms and the city. So, while similar *systems* or forms of labor were employed in the colonial period, they were

⁵³ Adam Benjamin. *Interview with Khamis Ali Juma*. November 23, 2020.

⁵⁴ Adam Benjamin. *Interview with Mohammad Salim Abdallah*. November 23, 2020.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

not necessarily organized around the same basis. The difference, as has been explored, was in the deep structure of labor.

Abstract time was not parceled into hours for a wage, nor was it used to valorize profit in the commodity-form. The worker was not necessarily reproduced at the site, as was the case with interviewed workers relying on subsistence at home to subsidize volunteer labor on the projects. It was not used to develop the infrastructure of market production, as was the case in the colonial development projects. Rather, this labor was used to enforce and further the reproduction of the state, which was attempting to glue this system together. That is the content which differs from McMahon's most recent analysis.

While these building and redevelopment projects became popular and were able to conjure significant amounts of volunteer labor, this only happened significantly later. The projects themselves began in 1966, but volunteer labor did not truly take off until after 1967, as society began to stabilize and social services such as housing were actually being completed.⁵⁶ Mwalimu Nassor Shehe said that he loved this work of "building the nation" and if he did not, he would simply run away. Ali Nassor Ali also said that he liked his work because it came from deep in his heart to build the nation.⁵⁷

Both of these workers started their labor service around 1971, which would be in conjunction with this shift in attitude. Reflecting from the words of both of these men, this demonstrates how much the legitimacy of the state's ambition rested in its ability to modernize and develop. Rehema Salum deeply resented to decline of the factories and government stores, which she holds to have provided a relative stability compared to the past. But as Stein noted in the case of Tanzania, the maintenance of this system was based on the circular imposition of the

⁵⁶ Clayton. *The Zanzibar Revolution...* 136.

⁵⁷ *Interview with Ali Nassor Ali...*

state's ability to reproduce itself and expand, in other words, to cohere an incoherent system together.

Incoherency

Ultimately the primary mechanism holding this system was the state's ability to cohere it together. Not only was the rise and fall of clove prices harmful to the island's economy, the conditions of this loose system of production were also internally unstable. Internal factionalism in the ASP, primarily between the communist Umma Party and the more conservative elements of the ASP, had created a contradictory system of land reform and industrial planning. While on the Mainland the land reform policy was collective agriculture through villagization, land reform was the polar opposite in Zanzibar. Instead, the ZRC opted for a program of smallholder plots of three acres titled *eka land*. In part to concede to their squatter base's demand for land, this system catered to the longstanding competition for land ownership.

While seemingly straightforward, the execution of this system was haphazard and confusing. This land reform was poorly managed and unstable, as many initiatives proved to be. Three acre parcels were distributed to patriarchs of families, but often land was given via preference or without an official deed.⁵⁸ While productivity and acres harvested of rice increased between 1964-1975, overall production fluctuated and then declined from 26,122 tons to 13,414 tons from 1972-1975.⁵⁹ Mechanization on one farm made room for only 16 workers where 48 were previously needed according to government sources.⁶⁰ Production on clove plantations was also hindered by the migration of labor to Zanzibar town, which held around 36% of clove production by the 1970s. To add to this labor shortage, there was the lack of regimented and

⁵⁸ Ibrahim Fokas Shao. *The political economy of land reforms in Zanzibar: before and after the revolution*. Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press, 1992. 52-53.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 84.

⁶⁰ Afro-Shirazi Party. *The ASP Revolution: 1964-1974*. Afro-Shirazi Party, 1972.

disciplined labor for industrial clove production. Patterns of migrant labor and squatter settlements were disrupted after the revolution, which previously helped to foster the development of its existing clove plantation workforce during the colonial era.⁶¹ Thus, like many of the aforementioned situations, the labor was not only unreliably reproducible, but what existed was undisciplined and transient. The ZRC was not able to surmount this into a steady working population without the internal production and reproduction of capital.

Instead, large cooperatives and communal farms were created without the help of peasants. Many of these were worked by urban dwellers recruited by the military, police, and women's associations among others.⁶² ASP Youth Wing headquarters dotted the city to absorb matriculating young workers. Among the many to work on these farms were the Young Pioneers, modeled after those in the GDR, who worked consistently in the fields and on public works projects during a series of camps. Like much of the volunteer work force, these laborers were idle hands, originally vagrant urban youth intended to become "disciplined" and "productive" according to education minister Ali Sultan Issa.⁶³ These disciplinary projects are, incidentally or not, part and parcel with the modernization projects which could foster a stable working population. This work was regimented and made into a calendar, yet was still unpaid. Eventually, citizens throughout Zanzibar Town had to organize collectively to perform tasks which could be "synchronized, coordinated, and rendered more efficient".⁶⁴

On the farms, the harvest was split between the workers and the peasants, while the workers did most of the tasks. In drives towards productivity, Jumbe initiated a system of *eka*

⁶¹ Ibid. 63.

⁶² Ibid. 81.

⁶³ G. Thomas Burgess. *Race, Revolution, and the Struggle for Human Rights in Zanzibar: the memoirs of ali sultan issa and seif sharif hamad*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009. 117.

⁶⁴ Thomas Burgess. "The Young Pioneers and the Rituals of Citizenship in Revolutionary Zanzibar." In *Africa Today*, Spring, Vol. 51, No. 3, Youth and Citizenship in East Africa (Spring 2005), pp. 3-29. 21.

land to seize land belonging to the elderly from them and permitting others to farm it.

Additionally, others could farm anywhere they like, even on another person's 3 acre plot as long as it did not disturb any permanent crops.⁶⁵ This system was the start of the slow crawl to full marketization. Specifically, this is a case where the state was trying to create a self-sufficient system using surpluses of labor and state institutions while also entrenching a system contingent on market production (squatting).

The full-circle incoherency in the *eka land* scheme, which reverberates into the present day, is well encapsulated by Ibrahim Mohammad Hussein.⁶⁶ According to him, many men, as a result of the *eka land* scheme were growing restless of farm life and migrated to the city to get work through the ASP Youth League. Because the *eka land* policy gave land to patriarchs who might have had five sons, many of those sons did not find it bearable to live on such land.

According to Hussein, many of these young men volunteered to work as sea men, on communal farms, and on building projects with the hopes of getting a permanent job through the military.

This story shows both the creation of a malleable yet unreliable surplus population and the advent of smallholder agriculture. If they were to move into one of the housing projects, as many families did, they could be even more well-directed, as Myers alludes to in his studies of power in this situation. But without regimented hours and stability, conscription, youth camps, migrant volunteers, and others cannot be the controlled form of labor necessary to fulfill the state's ambition without violent enforcement. According to Wimmelbücker, the building of the flats at Michenzani and Kikwajuni were initially difficult to start due to the work force's inexperience and non-discipline, where the East Germans were merely "mindless agents of

⁶⁵ Shao, *The political economy of land reforms...*

⁶⁶ Adam Benjamin. *Interview with Ibrahim Mohammad Hussein.*

modernization”.⁶⁷ What could, for the time being, glue this system together was the state. These schemes which they exerted their power and control over the country was the main form of statecraft that allowed for this necessary, if temporary control of labor for the whole system, laden in contradictions, to coalesce. But, this situation, through channels of dependency can be easily marketized. What helped bring it together, to a point, was also ideology.

Ideology and Modernization

The undoing of colonial conditions, such as the Stone Town-Ng’ambo divide and dependency, were critical in conjuring these laborers forward to help build these projects. Much like the state, ideology played a critical role in bringing this system together. Utilizing ideology, the ZRC espoused the doctrine of *kujenga taifa* and *kujitegemea* (self-reliance) were used to mobilize and motivate their base of peasants and mainland workers. In fact, the preference for mainlanders was even pronounced in the government according to Seif Sharif Hamad, who said that it threatened to rip Jumbe’s administration apart.⁶⁸ Those who refused to participate in this process of building the nation, as mentioned above, were deemed “traitors to development”.

This ideology, predicated on the racial discourse which led up to the 1964 Revolution, was a totalizing force. It encapsulated the entire system and resonates from banners on the project walls to the speeches given by Ali Sultan Issa in every village. Given the history of the colonial state from which the nation was recovering, the ideology of revolution catered to the needs of the constituent masses. In this way, it was It was this society’s bargain with itself which could motivate those to work for it so long as it could modernize various aspects of this society.

⁶⁷ Ludger Wimmelbücker. “Architecture and city planning projects of the German Democratic Republic in Zanzibar.” In *The Journal of Architecture*, Vol 17, No. 3, 2012.

⁶⁸ Burgess, *Race, Revolution...* 230

The state could legitimate itself by modernizing, and project this method into an ideological force which could in turn help mobilize more and more labor.

This ideological construct, based around loose ideas of pan-African nationalism, gave much weight to the purging of “counter-revolutionaries” and Karume’s late administration, prior to his assassination, was rife with rumors of plots and subversion by both monarchists and communists. Nationalization itself was, according to Ali Sultan Issa, Karume’s primary method for doing away with Asians in Zanzibar.⁶⁹ In many ways, this ideological structure and the system of production were both reflective of each other. But, in the end, the fundamentals of the mode of production were not coherent enough to sustain this dynamic. Rationing, torture, paranoia, imprisonment, and widespread sexual assault were also byproducts of this instability, the same instability which catapulted Jumbe’s turn towards slow marketization. But the modernist projects were not without their changes on the ground.

As E.P. Thompson notes, the rearranging of work-time is never flat. Industrialization, or the attempt thereof, mobilizes and changes cultural institutions.⁷⁰ While doing so in Zanzibar, they would need to create an ideological structure capable of mobilizing these institutions, the projection of their ambitious system. This discipline or ideology was realized at its most vulgar in the youth organizations that Burgess examined. Teachers, in this case, claimed that the Young Pioneers reflected the Zanzibari nationalist ideology of creating an African state to undo the colonial contradictions.⁷¹ As they coordinated marches and parades, so too did they help to consolidate ideological hegemony. But even on the ground level, the “creation of a new man using new machinery” that Issa references is also recognizable in the housing projects.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 128.

⁷⁰ E.P. Thompson. “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism.” *Past and Present*, No. 38, Dec 1967, pp. 56-97.

⁷¹ Burgess, “The Young Pioneers”

In the flats at Kikwajuni and Michenzani in Zanzibar Town, Myers points to a cultural form of resistance to any changes. There, the government found a robust series of customs or *desturi* common to Ng'ambo that may have originated from the mainland that these workers came from.⁷² In his view, these cultural adaptations to the flats were their cultural resistance to the extension of power on behalf of the government.⁷³ But what might have been a reaction to power and social control could also be the experience of “all that is solid melts into air”, originally from Marx and used by Marshall Berman to further illustrate the dynamics of modernity and modernization.⁷⁴

This imposition of power was not empty of content, it couldn't be. Rather, Issa's logic of new man and new machinery makes sense when considering these projects, a new way of articulating an unstable yet ambitious system. Thus, it would be wise to understand that in Africa the syncretic nature of the economic system meant that penetration by the post-colonial states meant a rearticulating and development of this system.⁷⁵ In this case, the projects intervened directly at the realm of household and cultural reproduction, which gave way to these cultural transgressions. In fact, the policy of the ZRC to essentially create fair and adequate housing, sufficient production, and raise wages, was fairly in line, though heavier handed, with other African ambitions towards European-style social democracy. With the downfall of this system, much like other systems, informalization and the continuation of dependency was imminent.

Conclusion: “Modernist Ruin”

⁷² Garth Andrew Myers. “Eurocentrism and African Urbanization: the Case of Zanzibar’s Other Side.” *Antipode* 26:3, 1994, pp. 195-215. 202-203.

⁷³ Garth Andrew Myers. “Revolutionary Zanzibar” in *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa*. N.Y.: Syracuse University Press. 2003.

⁷⁴ Marshall Berman. *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: the Experience of Modernity*. New York: Verso, 2010.

⁷⁵ Mabogunje. “Urban Planning and the Post-Colonial State.”

As we have seen, the state's modernization was its central function which could vindicate the ZRC's governing authoritarianism. Still, this unstable system, only pulled together by the state, was not enough to surmount dependency and create a "new man" out of these surplus populations created in the colonial era. Rather, these various transient classes were either entrenched into their context or undermined into the informal sector. Without any essential coherence, the system in Zanzibar gradually returned, with the help of Jumbe and others, to its ambiguous connection to market dependency. While capital might not have always been dominant in these relations, it nonetheless appeared frequently and slowly generalized itself as the shell once again.

Today in Zanzibar the housing projects of Unguja are now accompanied by a party "Revolution Museum" as well as a shopping mall. Stone Town, once neglected and crumbling, has been gradually and slowly revitalized as both a tourist destination and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The factories, save a clove oil factory in Pemba along with some others run by the ZSTC, are all but gone. Even on the mainland, the Chinese-built factories are manned by individuals and not producing, kept open one day a week as a token relic of old friendship. Dependency has somewhat deepened, but the economy has gradually transformed into a tourist economy, with smaller seaweed and cash crop production on the side. Many of the peasants still rely heavily on subsistence, but many of their children have moved from the countryside into the ever-expanding cities of Zanzibar Town and Dar es Salaam.

The jutting Plattenbau in Zanzibar in some ways fit Zeleke's description of "modernist ruin" in Addis Ababa, in which the landscape of the cities former regime relics (in her case revolutionary billboards) coalesce with the emergent commercial one.⁷⁶ The island's future, in an

⁷⁶ Elleni Centine Zeleke. "Addis Ababa as Modernist Ruin." In *Callaloo*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2010, pp. 117-135.

ever turbulent global capitalist landscape, is not immediately foreseeable. Much like the patterns of development explored above, Zanzibar finds its economy changing with the core dynamics remaining constant.

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